

Chapter 6

Goal, Issues, Objectives and Actions

The process for developing the 2015 North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan included public input via a large scale survey, an inventory of park lands and recreational facilities, numerous presentations to interested parties and analysis of issues related to outdoor recreation and natural resource conservation in the state. The culmination of the planning process is an action plan for the next five to ten years that will address the goal, issues and objectives that have been identified.

GOAL STATEMENT: *To meet the outdoor recreation needs of a growing population, to manage and protect North Carolina's natural resources for current and future citizens, and to achieve the related health and economic benefits for local communities and the state.*

Issue: Growing Population

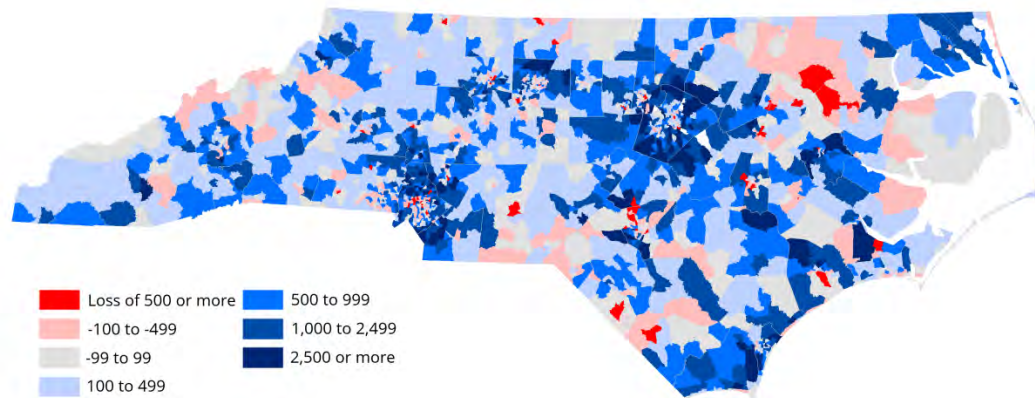
Objective #1: *Meet the needs of North Carolina's rapidly growing population by maintaining and enhancing its outdoor recreation resources*

From the majestic Blue Ridge Mountains to the crystal shores of the Outer Banks, North Carolina has at its fingertips, a wealth of outdoor recreation resources for its citizens to enjoy. Maintaining and enhancing these resources must be carefully studied and addressed as North Carolina's population continues to grow rapidly. North Carolina has been, and continues to be, among the fastest growing states in terms of population, in the US. Between 1990 and 2010 the state added 2.9 million new residents, growing by 44 percent.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, North Carolina's population grew at an annual rate of 1.7 percent between 2000 and 2010, far exceeding the nation's rate of 1.0 percent. Furthermore, migration accounted for 80% of North Carolina's growth during this time and the Census Bureau estimated that between 2010 and 2015, the number of people born outside of North Carolina could surpass the number of native North Carolinians living in the state. Although only the 28th largest state in terms of size, it is the 14th fastest growing state since 2010. In addition, North Carolina is currently the 10th most populace state and is projected to move into the 7th spot by the year 2030.

Ongoing effective natural resource management is critical due to the multitude of challenges caused by such rapid growth. Without proactive management of the state's parks and natural areas, the integrity of these unique spaces may be diminished and over time may be lost.

Total Population Change by NC Census Tract, 2000 to 2010



Data: 2000 and 2010 Census Summary File 1. 2000 Census tracts normalized to 2010 tract boundaries by Carolina Demography.

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This process should also include seeking creative means to take advantage of and highlight the value that parks and recreation services bring to protecting important natural resources, which in turn provides for a healthier populace and economy.

An additional factor to consider is the realization that many state and local parks that were funded by LWCF decades ago are aging. They either need renovating or totally repurposing to better serve the current needs of the citizens. Aging parks and recreation facilities may have totally outlived their intended usefulness by being in disrepair or obsolete. These areas, once considered jewels of the community, may benefit from rehabilitation and/or repurposing and may very well be diamonds in the rough, waiting to shine again.

For this initiative to be successful, park managers at all levels must continue to place importance on the critical need of protecting and growing North Carolina's natural and outdoor resources. This includes state parks, recreation areas, state forests, wildlife areas, lakes and rivers, as well as local and regional parks and recreation systems, land conservancies, non-profits, etc. Increased cooperation and collaboration will be vital in ensuring that North Carolina's outdoor recreation resources continue to serve and exist for its citizens in the changing times ahead.

Initiatives

- 1. Continue to plan for the maintaining and enhancing existing outdoor recreation resources.*
- 2. Promote public-private partnerships as well as increase collaboration between local governments, non-profits and volunteer groups to expand outdoor recreation resources.*

3. *Continue to support funding of the NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF), the reauthorization of stateside LWCF and the federal Recreational Trails Program and Transportation Alternatives Program to assist with new outdoor recreation resources in North Carolina.*
4. *Better educate citizens about the current and future outdoor recreation resource needs for a growing population.*
5. *Reduce the backlog of outdoor recreation areas and facilities in the state in need of major renovation, rehabilitation and/or repurposing.*
6. *Continue to design recreational facilities to ensure universal access with recognition of the needs of under-served and aging populations.*



Example: TRIAD PARK

Triad Park is a joint venture between Forsyth and Guilford Counties. A total of 426 acres have been bought and preserved by the counties for a regional centerpiece park which has nature based park facilities nestled in the woods and meadows of these two Piedmont counties. The cooperation between the two counties is a pro-active initiative to better serve the growing population of the two counties.

The partnership between the counties is unique in that each county contributed matching dollars for a common goal of acquiring, developing, and operating the new park. “Triadism”, a regional initiative, is a successful reality with Triad Park, the flagship of cooperation and dedication showing the best of what communities can do when they work together for the common good and welfare of their citizens.

Issue: Public Health

Objective #2: Support improvements in public health and fitness by increasing opportunities for physical activity

Researchers continue to provide scientific evidence about the health benefits of exercising outdoors by participating in outdoor recreation. Benefits include enhanced physical, mental and emotional well-being. Parks, trails and other outdoor recreation facilities can provide convenient, safe, and attractive places for North Carolinians to be physically active outdoors. Participation in outdoor activities is associated with a number of important health factors including more active citizens, connecting communities and improving physical and mental health.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “physical activity is one of the most important steps that people of all ages can take to improve their health”. There are continuous reminders of the high costs associated with obesity and related lifestyle diseases including hypertension, kidney disease, heart disease, and liver disease – all on the rise for children, some as young as age 12. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that the percentage of obese youth has tripled from 1980 to 2011.



The N.C. State Center for Health Statistics found that more than two thirds of adults are overweight or obese as well as an estimated 30% of children ages 10 – 17. Nationwide, local, county, state, and federal governments are working to reduce childhood obesity and encourage children and families to be more physically active through initiatives like Safe Routes to Play and other recreation planning and infrastructure programs. The provision of outdoor open

spaces and recreational space has been identified as a key to addressing these issues. Making parks accessible to all citizens will continue to be important.

The Outdoor Foundation's 2013 Outdoor Recreation Participation Report found 90 percent of adults who regularly recreate outdoors were introduced to outdoor activities between the ages of five and 18. This makes today's youth participation critical to encouraging similar patterns for future generations. Nearly 60 percent of children and young adults aged six through 24 participate in some type of outdoor recreation. However, the trend is toward reduced participation. In addition, the report found that minority populations participate less frequently, with only 21 percent participating. Increased "screen time" spent on television, video games and the internet have decreased time spent outdoors.

Initiatives and Recommendations

1. Provide more park land and recreational facilities to encourage children and their families to be more physically active.
2. Promote public and private partnerships, especially recreation providers, healthcare organizations, and insurance companies, to encourage physical activity through outdoor recreation.
3. Continue to seek efficiencies in providing more opportunities for outdoor recreation by leveraging projects with PARTF and LWCF assistance.
4. Provide communities up-to-date information about the role of accessible parks, open space, and non-motorized transportation routes in facilitating healthy residents.
5. Encourage the development of community policies, recreational facilities, schools, trails and bicycle-friendly routes to help people be more physically active.

Example: Two successful health and fitness programs are being conducted by the Mount Airy Parks and Recreation Department health and fitness programming in conjunction with the Surry County Health and Nutrition Center. The "Biggest Loser/Losing for Life" program is an adult offering that promotes long term diet and exercise modifications. The city also has the "Minus 15" program for children ages 11-15. This youth weight management program offers specialized exercise and nutritional support under the direction of a fitness specialist and classes by a Registered Dietician. Participants exercise weekly in the fitness center based on their goals, limitations and interests such as: fitness classes, weight training, sports activities, and a Fit-n-Fun Zone. Participants track height, weight, body fat, tape measurements, strength, cardiovascular fitness, and blood pressure.

Issue: Access and Cooperation

Objective #3: Improve the visibility of and public access to public recreation areas and foster cooperation between public recreation managers

According to the American Journal of Preventative Medicine, participation in outdoor recreation activities increases when people can safely and easily access well-maintained recreation facilities close to home. In addition, connecting parks and recreation facilities to each other, homes, schools, businesses and other local attractions by-way of trails can help ensure better access and increase usage of parks and their recreational facilities. The Outdoor Foundation's Barriers to the Outdoors report in 2010 found that the lack of transportation was one of the top barriers to greater participation in outdoor recreation activities.



The visibility of and public access to recreation areas in the state can be improved through increased cooperation between recreation providers in the state. Greater cooperation can provide efficiencies and help avoid duplication of services.

National and state parks, recreation areas, wildlife and forest areas provide large natural resource-oriented outdoor recreation areas in North Carolina. Closer to home, local parks and recreation systems, quasi-public, non-profit and private sector recreation providers all offer a broad range of recreational areas and opportunities across the state.

The North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan public and recreation provider's surveys demonstrate that the public wants a wider range of recreational opportunities in their communities and when they travel (see chapter 2). The public may not be aware of which

governmental or private entity provides the services as long as they are high quality, convenient and meet their needs. Recreation providers, working together, can provide an interconnected network of recreation spaces including land and water trails in the state.

Example:

An excellent example of cooperation in North Carolina is the development of the state's premier cross-state trail, the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST). The continuing development of this trail represents a creative partnership involving local governments, trail groups, land trusts, federal and state agencies, private landowners, volunteers, the non-profit Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (FMST) and North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation. The trail is an official part of the state parks system, with segments of the trail managed by different agencies and local governments.



Initiatives and Recommendations

1. Provide state (PARTF) and federal (LWCF) grants to state parks and local governments to improve access to public recreation areas by increasing the number of sites, facilities, programs or opportunities for the public to use natural and recreational resources.
 2. Expand the system of local, state and federal interconnected trails/greenways and access points through acquisition, development, renovation and expansion of corridors.
- LWCF and PARTF funding priorities in rank order will include:
- a. State trails such as the Mountains-to-Sea, French Broad River, Yadkin River and Deep River state trails; as well as regional trail systems;
 - b. Establishment of local trails where none exist in the jurisdiction;

- c. Close to home trails that connect homes, work places, schools, open space and recreation areas;
 - d. Providing access to water-based areas and trails
- 3. Recognize and reward partnerships between units of government, private non-profit, business and volunteer sectors in grant funding decisions.
- 4. Improve communication and coordination with community planners, economic development agencies, transportation departments and all levels of public recreation providers to better connect land and opportunities and to promote the availability and benefits of these resources.

Issue: Outdoor Recreation and the Economy

Objective #4: Promote the economic benefits of the state's recreation opportunities for communities across North Carolina

State and local lands provide outdoor recreation opportunities in all 100 counties of North Carolina. Expenditures by people who visit parks and participate in outdoor recreation make an important contribution to state and local economies. The influx of recreation dollars comes from more than just tourist-related businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, and shopping centers. It also encompasses the economic growth that results from people visiting or moving to an area to take advantage of its recreational amenities and services. This has the potential to transform a community by attracting businesses, retirees, and families seeking a higher quality of life.

Tourist expenditures create a demand for goods and services, thus creating jobs and income for local residents. In more rural areas near larger public land holdings such as state parks and lakes, it is not uncommon for a good portion of the economic activity in these areas to be largely impacted by tourists and visitors to the area. Tourism is one of North Carolina's largest industries. According to a travel research group, TNS TravelsAmerica, domestic travelers spent \$20.2 billion in North Carolina in 2013, a 4% increase over 2012 and a record high visitor spending figure.



Nationally, according to the 2012 *Outdoor Industry Association Report*, Americans spend an average of \$646 billion on outdoor recreation – including gear, supplies, vehicles, trips, travel-related expenses and more. This type spending helps to create jobs, generates tax revenue, helps support communities and is a driving force of the economy. This holds true in North Carolina where according to the above mentioned report, 48% of North Carolinians participate in outdoor recreation each year, which generates:

- \$19.2 billion in consumer spending
- \$1.3 billion in state and local tax revenue
- 192,000 direct North Carolina jobs
- \$5.6 billion in wages and salaries

America's State Parks reveals that in 2009 there were approximately 725 million visits to 6,000 state parks across the United States, generating an economic impact of \$20 billion for the communities surrounding these parks. This is an excellent return on the investment of only \$2.5 billion, which was the nationwide annual budget expenditure for all of these state parks.



Property values are also impacted by the location of parks, open spaces, trails, etc. The Trust for Public Land conducted a study on the economic impact of the location of parks in relation to neighborhoods. They found that the value of residential properties immediately adjacent to parks increased property values as much as 20%. For other nearby properties, values could increase by 5% to 10%.

Preserving access to North Carolina's abundant outdoor recreation areas and venues, directly relates to protecting the economy, businesses, communities and people who depend on the ability to play outside and reap the benefits of outdoor recreation.

Example: The November, 2014 mid-term elections in North Carolina saw overwhelming public support for all the local parks and recreation bond referendums.

- Raleigh voters passed a \$ 92 million parks bond with 68% approval
- Winston-Salem voters passed a \$ 31 million parks bond with 69% approval
- Wake Forest voters passed a \$ 14 million parks bond with 65.6% approval
- Blowing Rock voters passed a \$ 1 million parks bond with 73% approval
- Hickory voters passed a \$ 25 million bond with 60% approval including funding for a riverwalk connecting a major riverfront park to a popular minor league baseball park as well as a greenway linking Lenoir-Rhyne University to downtown Hickory.



These bonds can serve as significant economic stimulators locally for community revitalization by creating local construction and supplier jobs and additional local spending for construction materials. Depending on the type of recreational area or facility being developed by the park bond, additional private recreation vendor businesses could be created.

Initiatives and Recommendations

- 1. Provide information about economic impact of state and local parks to increase appreciation for the value of parks to North Carolina's economy.*
- 2. Increase marketing efforts of local and state outdoor recreation opportunities to increase participation and gain support of natural and recreation resources, which in turn should enhance the economic impact.*
- 3. Develop and promote recreation programs, events, and facilities that attract regional travelers, to encourage overnight stays.*
- 4. Partner local organizations such as chambers of commerce, convention and visitor bureaus, and recreation related businesses to promote, support and help sponsor events, programs and facilities that bring outside dollars into the communities.*

Issue: Conservation

Objective #5: Protect and conserve North Carolina's high quality natural resources and landscapes

Mountains, forests, farms, rivers, streams, shorelines and other natural resources contribute to public health, economic stability, and quality of life in North Carolina. The state has seen rapid growth in recent years. With this growth, comes major residential and commercial development, which is changing the natural landscape.

North Carolina has made considerable progress in identifying the most important natural resources, landscapes, and watersheds for protection. Since 2005 over 388,000 acres of land across North Carolina have been protected from development through a variety of public and private actions. This has been made possible, in part, through the completion of local natural heritage inventories, farmland protection plans, and the development of the state's Conservation Planning Tool.

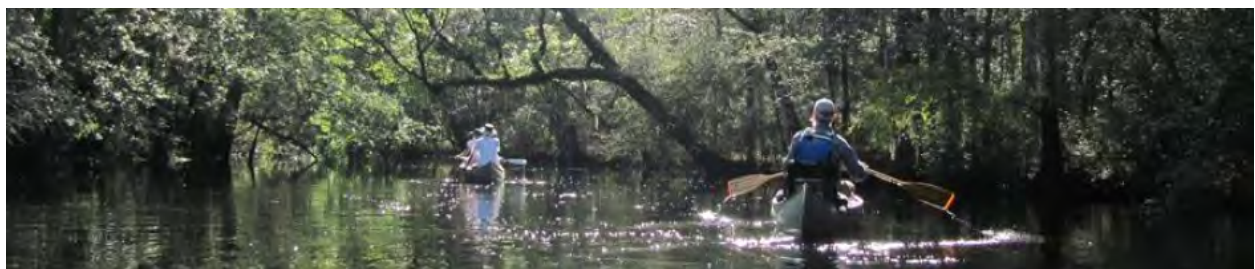
However, in recent years, land conservation and acquisition in North Carolina has slowed considerably. Between 2005 and 2008, an average of 75,160 acres of land was protected per year. Between 2009 and 2011, an average of only 29,580 acres of land was protected. To strengthen the commitment of protecting North Carolina's natural resources and landscapes, the state has three conservation trust funds to invest in infrastructure that supports economic development in North Carolina, as well as working to preserve the state's unique natural resources.



These three conservation trust funds and their objectives which have been established by the state of North Carolina are:

- *The Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF)*: Created in 1996, the CWMTF has been a primary source of grant funds for local governments, state agencies, and conservation non-profits to improve water quality through riparian buffers and other water quality projects, provide buffers around military bases, acquire land that represents the ecological diversity as well as historic properties.
- *The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF)*: Created in 1994, PARTF is North Carolina's principal funding source for state parks as well as for local parks and recreation projects. Legislation authorizes 65 percent of trust fund revenue for state park projects, 30 percent for local matching grants and five percent for beach access.
- *The Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund (ADFPTF)*: Founded in 1986, the ADFPTF supports public and private enterprise programs that promote sustainable agricultural, horticultural and forestland activities. It also funds conservation easements, which help keep land in production of food, fiber, and other agricultural products.

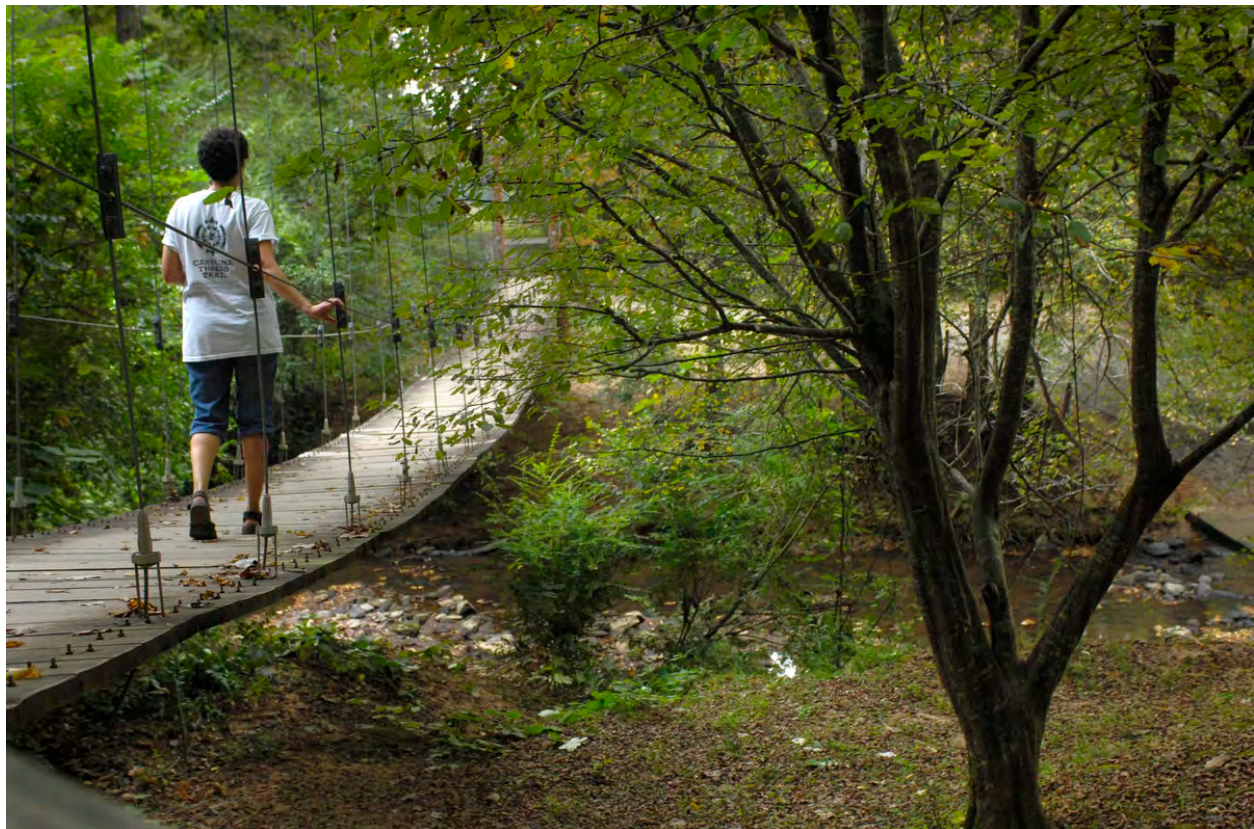
In addition, the Environmental Enhancement Grant Program awards grants under an agreement with Smithfield Foods to provide \$50 million over 25 years to improve the environment. Projects supported by the grants have resulted in the the restoration or conservation of more than 20,700 acres of natural areas and wildlife habitat.



Land conservation should be viewed as an essential ingredient in the efforts to enhance North Carolina's economic prosperity, health, and quality of life. Local, state and federal government agencies can work more efficiently by working with private and nonprofit land trust organizations to protect and conserve important natural resources and landscapes. Balancing economic growth with conservation can help create a vibrant and prosperous future.

For example, most of the property The Nature Conservancy has protected has been transferred into public ownership so that everyone can benefit. In fact, the Conservancy has transferred more than 600,000 acres into public ownership – state and national forests, state parks, national wildlife refuges and state game lands. People play, hike, paddle, hunt and fish on public lands that were protected by The Nature Conservancy.

A recent study by The Trust for Public Land found that North Carolina's investment in conservation via these trust funds has returned four dollars for every one dollar spent. The value comes in the form of natural goods and services, such as cleaner drinking water sources, erosion control and flood mitigation. Additional economic benefits result from the impact that conservation has on jobs, agribusiness, parks and recreation, military bases, and tourism. Agriculture and defense are the two largest sectors of North Carolina's economy, with an annual impact of \$77 billion and \$26 billion, respectively.



Example: The Green Growth Toolbox is a technical assistance tool designed to provide communities, local governments, land use planners, planning boards and developers with data and recommendations for conservation of priority wildlife habitats that can be used in local land use planning, land use policy-making and development design. The Green Growth Toolbox includes a handbook, GIS dataset, and website, and local governments who want to use the

Green Growth Toolbox can sign up for daylong training workshops. The Green Growth Toolbox project includes data from the One NC Naturally Conservation Planning Tool, and is a cooperative, non-regulatory effort led by the Wildlife Diversity Program of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.



Initiatives and Recommendations

- 1. Identify key state and local lands for acquisition in adopted regional and local open space and park plans. Encourage acquisition of important time-sensitive properties.*
- 2. Support state and local land use planning that bolsters conservation of important natural resources/landscapes and opportunities for outdoor recreation.*
- 3. Identify, encourage and enable land preservation around military installations, linking agriculture and defense to strengthen the state's economy and military readiness.*
- 4. Seek partnerships with federal, state, and local governments, as well as non-profits on coordinated goals for the continued protection, enhancement, and expansion of important natural resources and landscapes.*
- 5. Pursue land donations including easements, inheritance trusts, developer incentives, etc. to assist in acquiring and preserving important outdoor natural resources.*
- 6. Promote Green Infrastructure Practices and energy conservation in the planning, design, construction, and operation of outdoor recreation facilities.*
- 7. Continue to connect natural areas and ecosystems to improve biodiversity and wildlife management statewide.*

Issue: Public Awareness

Objective #6: Increase public awareness of the state's natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities through interpretation, education, and outreach

Achieving this objective involves informing citizens of the vast natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities in North Carolina to encourage a greater appreciation for these resources. This includes highlighting the value of parks in protecting important natural resources, while improving the health and economic well-being of North Carolinians. Increasing the opportunities for conservation education should be central to the effort because it encourages people to appreciate and conserve the state's natural resources.

A special emphasis should be placed on young people. As children are becoming more apt to choose indoor activities, such as gaming and tracking social media, it's challenging to find ways to reconnect them to nature. Studies show that environmental education and getting outdoors improves student achievement in core subjects such as science, math, and language arts and makes them more interested in learning overall (Ernst and Moore, Environmental Education Research 2004). In addition, getting kids outside and active promotes healthy lifestyles, which helps address childhood obesity, diabetes, attention deficit disorder, depression, stress and other physical and mental ailments that are becoming all too common with today's sedentary lifestyle (American Academy Of Pediatrics).



Likewise, when people use parks and other outdoor recreation resources, the environment is the beneficiary. Creating stronger connections between children and parks fosters current and future stewards who understand and appreciate nature.

Although social media is becoming more popular, an effective way to reach children and families is to place printed literature in the hands of school students. This should include information about local parks, the importance of outdoor recreation, and the associated mental and physical health benefits of outdoor recreation. Suggestions about inexpensive outdoor activities, such as walking, hiking and jogging, would be helpful because they are available to nearly anyone.



It is also important to continually explore effective ways to expose people to North Carolina's nature and wildlife resources. Increasing the public's appreciation for these natural treasures can also promote a greater interest in stewardship. In the end, if people enjoy outdoor recreation resources and activities, it should lead to improved stewardship and conservation of North Carolina's valuable natural resources for the enjoyment of future generations.

Initiatives and Recommendations

1. *Increase the use of environmental education and conservation curriculum in the state's K-12 school systems. Promote opportunities to take students outdoors to learn about the environment through visits to state and local parks.*
2. *Promote important natural resources, recreation events, programs and facilities.*

3. *Develop online educational materials and make them available for distribution at NC State Parks as well as local government parks and recreation agencies.*
4. *Develop and distribute printed materials in schools promoting outdoor recreation opportunities that can be sent home with students.*
5. *Improve public information about outdoor recreation opportunities as well as the value of protecting natural resources in the state.*

Example: Kids in Parks TRACK Trails Program

Kids in Parks started in 2008 with a vision of improving the health of children and the health of parks by making existing trails more attractive and fun for novice users. At that time the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, National Park Service, and BCBS of North Carolina Foundation joined together to formally link the health of children to the health of parks by creating a strong network of trails and partners in the communities on and along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The regional program was so successful that parks across the country rapidly embraced Kids in Parks TRACK Trails due to demonstrated effectiveness and ease of implementation. Today there are more than 80 TRACK Trails in seven states, comprising a national network of self-guided adventures- including hiking, disc golf, and geocaching – that inspire kids and families to be more physically active outdoors. Each TRACK Trail features self-guided brochures and signs designed to help families enjoy the outdoors experience.

One such successful TRACK Trails program in North Carolina is located in Smithfield, at Smithfield Community Park. The Smithfield Community Park TRACK Trail is an easy 1 mile loop around the perimeter of the entire park. This flat, paved trail around the 47-acre park features up close views and access to forest areas, creeks, and wetlands areas. For a longer adventure, the 3 mile Buffalo Creek Greenway can be accessed half-way around the loop.



Smithfield Community Park – TRACK Trail

Coordination with National Planning for Outdoor Recreation and Land Conservation

The goals and objectives for the North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan are designed to not only meet the needs of residents and visitors, but also meet many national goals established by America's Great Outdoors (AGO), a 2011 initiative to develop a 21st Century conservation and recreation agenda.

AGO Goals to be met:

- 1) Increase and improve recreational access and opportunities on public lands;
- 2) Cultivate stewardship and appreciation of America's natural, cultural, and historic resources through innovative awareness initiatives and through education;
- 3) Build stewardship values and engage youth in conservation and recreation;
- 4) Invigorate the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to better meet conservation and recreation needs;
- 5) Create and enhance a new generation of safe, clean, accessible great urban parks and community green spaces;
- 6) Advance national, regional, and community-supported efforts to preserve and enhance unique landscapes, natural areas, historic sites, and cultural areas while ensuring openness and transparency in any land designations; and
- 7) Empower communities to connect with America's great outdoors through their rivers and waterways

With the matching of statewide goals with AGO goals, North Carolina will be able to more efficiently use the state's LWCF apportionments over the next five years to create and promote outdoor recreation facilities and opportunities across the state.